



The President's Daily Brief

11 April 1972

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

The military situation in South Vietnam is reported on *Page 1*.

The joint communiqué following East German party leader Honecker's visit to the USSR condemns increased US bombing of North Vietnam, but other Soviet commentary is still taking a positive line toward President Nixon's upcoming visit. (*Page 2*)

The two political murders in Argentina yesterday, together with evidence of growing economic unrest, may have significant repercussions on President Lanusse's support within the military. (*Page 3*)

North and South Korea have agreed to begin formal Red Cross discussions within the next month. (*Page 4*)

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SOUTH VIETNAM

South Vietnamese Rangers in Quang Tri Province thwarted an enemy sapper attack yesterday against a key bridge that links the province capital with the northern part of the province. This follows a string of government successes in blunting enemy attacks in the two northernmost provinces in the past few days. The government is now claiming significant victories, asserting that more than 1,000 North Vietnamese were killed and about three dozen enemy tanks destroyed in the weekend attacks around Dong Ha, on Fire Support Base Pedro west of Quang Tri city, and in lesser actions in both Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces.

Despite clearly heavy losses in recent engagements, Communist units still appear to be preparing for additional strong attacks.

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There is evidence that the Communists have now committed all of their 202nd Tank Regiment, a force of some 140-160 tanks, south of the DMZ.

To the north of Saigon, the Communist assault against An Loc, the capital of Binh Long Province, has eased for the time being. South Vietnamese reinforcements have been delayed in trying to reach the city, however, by a Communist force blocking Route 13. Information from prisoners and documents taken in the recent fighting near An Loc indicates that the Communists may have moved their entire 9th Division into Binh Long Province, increasing their force there to five regiments.

Communist action elsewhere in the country yesterday remained largely confined to harassing attacks, but evidence continued to accumulate that the Communists are telling their forces that the current offensive is their biggest and most important to date. An enemy notebook captured in the fighting northwest of Saigon contained briefing notes stating that the campaign would exceed that of Tet 1968 and have "more decisive success than Dien Bien Phu." A North Vietnamese prisoner captured in the central highlands said his unit had been told that the new offensive would continue through June.

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USSR

In the communiqué issued at the end of East German party leader Honecker's visit to the USSR, Brezhnev and Honecker expressed solidarity with the Indochinese "patriots" and "decisively condemned" increased US bombing raids over North Vietnam. The two made no attempt to link the bombings to the Communist offensive and instead implied that they had resulted from the US decision to boycott the Paris peace talks.

This is Moscow's first elite reference to any phase of the current situation in Vietnam, although there have been routine statements of support for the Vietnamese Communists since the heavy fighting resumed. While the Soviets want to say something in support of their Vietnamese allies, they apparently do not want to go so far as to antagonize the US in advance of the upcoming summit.

At the same time, a Soviet radio commentary beamed to the domestic audience yesterday took a wholly positive line toward the forthcoming summit. The commentator cited the passage in the President's foreign policy report on improved US-USSR relations as expressing not only the attitude of the Administration but also the wish of "the widest possible circles of the American public." He also recalled Brezhnev's positive appraisal of the summit last month. The commentary omitted all mention of Vietnam and seemed to strike a defensive note in vowing that Moscow would not sell out its allies.

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ARGENTINA

President Lanusse's already formidable task of finding solutions to Argentina's economic and political problems is getting more difficult by the day. Serious economic problems are breeding popular disaffection with his government, and political violence is threatening to undermine his position with the military.

Violence reached a new and dangerous level yesterday with the assassination of General Juan Carlos Sanchez and the murder of the Fiat executive kidnaped last month. The assassination of Sanchez--commander of the II Army Corps in Rosario, some 200 miles north of the capital--came just hours before Italian industrialist Oberdan Sallustro was shot when police closed in on a "people's prison" in a suburb of Buenos Aires. A communiqué from military headquarters denounced the terrorist assassins of General Sanchez--believed to be the same group that kidnaped Sallustro--and pledged continuing support for President Lanusse and his effort to move Argentina toward elections next year.

Despite this public showing of military support, President Lanusse is likely to come under considerable political pressure. His belated action in suspending the utility rate increase that touched off four days of violence in Mendoza last week does not get to the heart of the problem. Rapidly rising inflation and growing unemployment, particularly in the provinces, have created a situation made to order for left-wing terrorists and labor agitators.

All of the top army officers are publicly committed to Lanusse's announced intention of turning over the government to elected officials next year and have seemed genuinely interested in getting the military out of the direct business of government. The events of the past few weeks, however, are almost certain to prompt new thinking on this matter. Lanusse's policy of conciliation has so far resulted only in more trouble and his personal popularity has dropped to the point where many top military officers no longer consider him a potential candidate. If the economy and the security situation continue to deteriorate, many officers will begin to search for an alternative to Lanusse and his political and economic policies.

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KOREA

Seoul and Pyongyang have agreed to hold formal Red Cross discussions within a month, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Pyongyang has accepted a secret invitation to send Red Cross officials to Seoul for the opening formal sessions, which will alternate between Seoul and Pyongyang. The agreement comes after almost eight months of preliminary haggling at Panmunjom over the agenda for the formal meetings, which will focus on reuniting divided families.

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[REDACTED] *The Red Cross sessions in the two capitals may well provide the cover for continuing discussions on sensitive political issues.*

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NOTES

USSR: Satellite photography shows that the Soviets have produced a new version of the TU-144 supersonic transport that is some 20 feet longer than the original prototype. [REDACTED]

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USSR-Turkey: Soviet President Podgorny starts a week-long visit to Turkey today, returning President Sunay's visit to the USSR in 1969. We expect the visit to be largely a routine affair. Ankara may agree to a "declaration of principles" expressing a desire for better relations, but it is likely to steer away from either a friendship or consultation agreement with the Soviets.

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